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ABSTRACT

The 1830s marked a lush first flowering of democratic journalism in America--participatory journalism of the sort that Alexis de Tocqueville heralded. But contrary to standard journalism history, this democratic press had nothing to do with the rise of the penny press; in fact, William Lloyd Garrison's abolitionist paper, "The Liberator," best expresses Tocqueville's ideals. Trusting in God's truth, Garrison argued that free inquiry would lead to truth and that slavery could not stand up to free discussion. As time went on, Garrison moved from a narrow antislavery stand to advocacy of free expression and free exercise of reason in all areas. For him, discussion was the essence of both journalism and democracy, and reader participation and free discussion involving all parties were essential to the paper. But in the end, though both Tocqueville and Garrison believed in a participatory, associational, group-based press, the penny papers that grew up in the 1830s and 1840s did not embody their ideal, ending up more commercial than democratic. (JL)

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TOCQUEVILLE, GARRISON, AND THE PERFECTION OF JOURNALISM

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Abstract

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What is the purpose of the newspaper in a democratic society? Alexis de Tocqueville thought he knew the answer to this question, and he thought he saw emerging in the United States in the 1830s a newspaper system that would serve democracy well. Tocqueville's vision, however, usually so prescient and sure, was uncharacteristically short sighted when focused upon the press. Within two years of Tocqueville's visit to the United States in 1831-32, a democratic revolution of sorts in the American newspaper press had indeed begun, with the arrival of the first penny paper in New York City.

But democratization via commercialization, the hallmark of the penny press, what not at all what Tocqueville thought he saw at hand in 1831-32. Tocqueville was misled because he had visited the United States during what was perhaps the most critical turning point in American press history. Tocqueville observed the American press through a kind of democratic, pluralist window that seemed to have opened in America with the rise of voluntary associationism and that would close again with the onslaught of journalistic commercialism. It was a fleeting glimpse of what democratic journalism might have been in America -- but never was.

This paper is about Tocqueville's vision and how that vision was embodied in one American newspaper in the 1830s, William Lloyd Garrison's abolitionist paper, The Liberator. In general, I argue that this period marked a lush first flowering of democratic journalism in America -- participatory journalism of the sort that Tocqueville heralded. But this flush of democracy in journalism had nothing to do with the rise of the penny press, as standard journalism histories take for granted; in fact, the penny press was inherently inimical to it.

More specifically, I argue that William Lloyd Garrison's vision of participatory journalism was as central to his understanding of human society as was his vision of abolition and universal emancipation. Indeed, it might be said that for both Garrison and Tocqueville the perfection of democratic society and the perfection of journalism were one.

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Presented to the History Division, Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication annual convention, Corvallis, Oregon, August, 1983.

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What is the purpose of the newspaper in a democratic society? Alexis de Tocqueville thought he knew the answer to this question, and he thought he saw emerging in the United States in the 1830s a newspaper system that would serve democracy well. Tocqueville's vision, however, usually so prescient and sure, was uncharacteristically short sighted when focused upon the press. Within two years of Tocqueville's visit to the United States in 1831-32, a democratic revolution of sorts in the American newspaper press had indeed begun, with the arrival of the first penny paper in New York City. The first volume of Tocqueville's Democracy in America appeared the same year, 1835, as the greatest of the early penny papers, James Gordon Bennett's New York Herald. But democratization via commercialization, the hallmark of the penny press, was not at all what Tocqueville thought he saw at hand in 1831-32. Tocqueville was misled because he had visited the United States during what was perhaps the most critical turning point in American press history. Tocqueville observed the American press through a kind of democratic, pluralist window that seemed to have opened in America with the rise of voluntary associationism and that would close again with the onslaught of journalistic commercialism. It was a fleeting glimpse of what democratic journalism might have been in America -- but never was.

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lush first flowering of democratic journalism in America -- participatory journalism of the sort that Tocqueville heralded. But this flush of democracy in journalism had nothing to do with the rise of the penny press, as standard journalism histories take for granted; in fact, the penny press was inherently inimical to it. More specifically, I will argue that William Lloyd Garrison's vision of participatory journalism was as central to his understanding of human society as was his vision of abolition and universal emancipation. Indeed, it might be said that for both Garrison and Tocqueville the perfection of democratic society and the perfection of journalism were one.

II

For Tocqueville, one of the most remarkable traits of Americans was their penchant for organizing voluntary associations. He wrote:

> There are not only commercial and industrial associations in which all take part, but others of a thousand different types -- religious, moral, serious, futile, very general and very limited, immensely large and very minute. Americans combine to give fetes, found seminaries, build churches, distribute books, and send missionaries to the antipodes. Hospitals, prisons, and schools take shape in that way. Finally, if they want to proclaim a truth or propagate some feeling by the encouragement of a great example, they form an association.[1]

Tocqueville explained the Americans' lust to organize according to his central theme about American society: equality. "Among democratic peoples," he said, "associations must take the place of the powerful private persons whom equality of conditions has eliminated."[2]

Newspapers, Tocqueville believed, were crucial instruments for democratic association building:

> Newspapers make associations, and associations make newspapers; and if it were true to say that associations must multiply as quickly as conditions become equal, it is equally certain that the number of papers increases in proportion as associations multiply.[3]

In a democratic society such as the United States, newspapers emerge as one of the few bulwarks against the menace of individualism, and Tocqueville was extra-

vagant in his hopes for them. "We should underrate their importance," he said, if we thought they just guaranteed liberty; they maintain civilization."[4]

Newspapers maintain civilization in a democracy, Tocqueville believed, by making collective thought and action possible. They permit many people to think the same thoughts and to feel the same feelings, simultaneously. A newspaper will live only if it serves this communitarian function. "A newspaper therefore always represents an association whose members are its regular readers. This association may be more or less strictly defined, more or less closed, more or less numerous, but there must at least be the seed of it in men's minds, for otherwise the paper would not survive." Newspapers thrive in a democracy, not because they are cheap, but because people need them "to communicate with one another and to act together."[5]

Tocqueville's assertion that America was the greatest newspaper country in the world was almost an understatement. At the time of Tocqueville's visit in the early 1830s, the United States had some 900 newspapers, about twice as many as Great Britain, its nearest rival. Aggregate newspaper circulation in America was significantly higher as well. Moreover, the newspaper business was growing rapidly. By 1840, the census counted 1,631 papers; by 1850, the figure reached 2,526, with a total annual circulation of nearly half a billion copies. The decades from 1820 to 1850 might be called the take-off stage for <u>daily</u> newspapers. From a handful of twenty-four dailies in 1820, the daily newspaper industry grew to 138 papers in 1840 and to 254 in 1850. By 1850, dailies accounted for more than half of the annual circulation of all periodicals in America. Yet despite the rise of the daily, the weekly newspaper was then and would remain for some time to come the most common and ubiquitous form of newspaper journalism in America.[6]

The plethora of newspapers reflected the pluralism of America, in Tocqueville's view. Partly this was due to the federal principle in government, which was in

turn the product of an intense localism in American public life. Each county, township, and village held its sacred portion of governmental authority, and thus each developed a local political culture and a local political press. This was the era of the frontier newspaper and the local booster press. But pluralism was not an aspect of geographical localism only, for much of the association building that Tocqueville observed was beginning to be state-wide, regional, even national. Many of the hundreds of new weekly journals that emerged in this era were trans-local and specialized by content and audience.[7] If this was the era of the urban daily and the frontier weekly, it was also the era of another new kind of journalism that impressed Tocqueville very much: the national associational press.

The 1830s and '40s have been called the Age of Reform; and perhaps no other period in American history has displayed such intensity, diversity, and optimism in reform ideology or in the organization of reform work. The nation's founding fathers were now dead, and to their children had fallen the duty to preserve and to perfect the American experiment. Many viewed this as a heavy burden indeed, for America was rapidly changing in challenging and often disturbing ways. Industrialization, urbanization, immigration, changes in political, social, and family life -- all seemed to require some kind of intervention, some kind of reformation. The result was the termperance movement, prison reform, utopian communitarianism, religious missions and Sunday schools, public school reform, insane asylums, feminism, labor unionism, pacifism, and more. This was, as activists then termed it, a great "Sisterhood of Reforms."[8]

The unifying spirit of this age of reform was perfectionism. Narrowly construed, perfectionism was an evangelical religious doctrine that rejected the pessimistic Calvinist view of human nature, declaring instead that individual sinners could themselves repudiate sin and become sanctified on earth.[9] But the spirit of perfectionism flowed far beyond evangelical Protestant Christianity.

The notion that men and women could do something to save themselves meant also that they could act to save their world. In any age, the great impetus to reform is not the realization that man is sinful and the world flawed; people have always known that. Reform grows from the belief that individuals can do something about it. In the 1830s and '40s, religious doctrines of perfectionism merged nicely with democratic, romantic, and progressive impulses in the secular world to produce a great flood tide of reform.[10]

The growth of national reform associations, however, depended also upon things more mundane than religious spirit. To organize on a national or regional scale, a reform group needed an effective communication network. The infrastructure for such networks was beginning to be built in the 1830s, as America moved into its industrial revolution. Most important was the so-called transportation revolution, including improved post roads and turnpikes, river and ocean steamers, interior canals, and finally railroads. These technological advances in transportation permitted the faster and cheaper movement not only of manufactured goods and agricultural produce, but of preachers, lecturers, and organization agents as well.[11] Meanwhile, improvements in printing and papermaking technologies greatly reduced the cost of producing books, pamphlets, newspapers, and other associational literature. By the 1830s, perhaps for the first time in American history, a man could actually make a living as a reform lecturer or organizational journalist.[12] This communication revolution seemed to hold great promise for the perfection of both journalistic and democratic pluralism in America.

One relatively minor reform movement of the early 1830 eventually grew to touch, in one way or another, nearly every aspect of reform thought and action by the 1850s. This was the movement for the abolition of slavery. Though abolitionists were strikingly diverse in the doctrines they professed and in the methods they practiced, they shared the perfectionist faith that the nation

could be saved from sin by the works of man.[13] They also shared a shrewd understanding of the new technological possibilities for mass communication.

Between its founding in 1833 and its factional split in 1840, the American Anti-Slavery Society displayed vividly how an organization could exploit the transportation/communication revolution. From the beginning, the society saw its chief purpose as agitation and propaganda: the moral suasion of American public opinion. The society's Declaration of Sentiments, adopted at the founding convention in December, 1833, makes this intent clear:

> We shall organize Anti-Slavery Societies, if possible, in every city, town and village in our land.
>
> We shall send forth agents to lift up the voice of remonstrance, of warning, of entreaty, and of rebuke.
>
> We shall circulate, unsparingly and extensively, anti-slavery tracts and periodicals.
>
> We shall enlist the pulpit and the press in the cause of the suffering and the dumb.[14]

The abolitionists found most pulpits closed to them, but the printing press proved to be a ready and powerful ally. After quickly founding a weekly newspaper, The Emancipator, the society next launched what was up to that time the greatest printed propaganda campaign in American history. In 1835, the society flooded the mails with more than a million pieces of anti-slavery literature, which were sent free to people all over the country, especially in the South. The materials ranged from four new monthly journals and a children's newspaper to woodcuts, handkerchiefs, and even chocolate wrappers.[15]

Public reaction to this onslaught of abolition propaganda was close to hysterical, especially in the South. Southern newspapers denounced the "incendiary literature"; mobs burned the mail sacks; postmasters stopped delivery, with the blessing of Postmaster General Amos Kendall; and finally Southern state legislatures prohibited the importation of "inflammatory" publications.[16]

For Southerners, the mammoth scale of the 1835 propaganda campaign seemed

clear evidence that abolitionism was an enormously rich and powerful conspiracy, centered in New York, which was determined to destroy traditional local values and institutions. For them, this nationalization of organization and communication was a threat to the decentralized structure of American republicanism. In reality, the American Anti-Slavery Society was neither rich nor powerful. It only seemed so because printing and postage were cheap. Printing rates for the society, in fact, had fallen almost by half in a single year, between 1834 and 1835.[17] What both Southerners and Northerners saw in the great "postal campaign" of 1835 was the birth of a new kind of journalism, which was intimately wedded to a new participant in American pluralism: the national voluntary association.

The printing press was an instrument not solely for propaganda and agitation. Perhaps more important, it was also a builder of community among the already converted, the role that Tocqueville was most interested in. The abolitionist movement became a kind of religious congregation in the 1830s, with its members scattered across the land, linked together through letters, traveling agents and lecturers, pamphlets, and, perhaps especially, newspapers. In addition, the transportation revolution permitted more people to travel to annual conventions, abolitionist fairs and bazaars, and even to anti-slavery conclaves abroad. At least a few leaders could dedicate their lives to the cause, and make a living at it.[18] This was something new to American democracy, and to American journalism as well.

III

One man who made his living in abolitionism was William Lloyd Garrison, a journalist by training and temperament, and for thirty-five years the editor of the most notorious abolitionist paper of them all. Garrison has regularly been glorified and vilified, in a kind of cyclical fashion, since his death in 1879.

Historical opinion has at times portrayed him as the moral conscience of the nation; at other times it has dismissed him as a nettlesome, egotistical fanatic.[19] Nearly everyone, however, including his most ardent debunkers, has paid tribute to his skills as a journalist. The most relentless of Garrison's twentieth-century detractors, Gilbert H. Barnes, wrote: "He was equipped by taste and temperament for free-lance journalism and for nothing else. As a journalist he was brilliant and provocative; as a leader for the anti-slavery host he was a name, an embodied motto, a figurehead of fanaticism."[20] Despite agreement that he was a talented journalist, however, surprisingly little attention has been paid to Garrison's philosophy of journalism. This is surprising not because journalism is so important in itself, but because journalism was central to Garrison's understanding of emancipation and of the nature of a good society.

Above all else, Garrison believed in God; and because he believed in God he also believed in truth. Truth -- God's truth -- was what he proposed to tell in the pages of The Liberator, the little abolitionist paper that he launched in 1831. "I desire to thank God," he wrote in his famous opening statement, "that he enables me to disregard 'the fear of man which bringeth a snare,' and to speak his truth in its simplicity and power." In the second issue, he reaffirmed his "unshaken reliance in the omnipotence of truth." This would continue to be The Liberator's clarion call for thirty-five years.[21] During the turbulent postal campaign of 1835, when the whole country seemed bent upon silencing the abolitionists, Garrison consistently and serenely held up God's truth as the one sure defense. "Ours is that fanaticism which listens to the voice of God," he wrote. "Ours is the incendiary spirit of truth, that burns up error."[22]

Men who declare God's truth to hard-hearted sinners are usually called prophets, and this is indeed what Garrison thought he was. His language was

harsh, he often said, because truth was harsh; and people did not want to hear it. But truth would eventually have its way.[23] After the Nat Turner insurrection in August, 1831, Garrison wrote with Biblical sureness: "Read the account of the insurrection in Virginia, and say whether our prophesy be not fulfilled." On another occasion he said of his "hard language": "Like the hand-writing upon the wall of the palace, it has caused the knees of the American Belshazzar to smite together in terror, and filled with dismay all who follow in his train."[24] What Garrison called prophesy others called agitation. We today might call it an effort in agenda setting. By whatever name it is called, the abolitionists' aim was to keep their unpopular message constantly before the public until the consciences of the people were finally touched. This incessant "truth telling" was central to the abolitionists' mission, as Garrison and many others defined it.[25]

Garrison's reputation as a self-righteous, egocentric, intolerant fanatic stems from strident pronouncements such as these about God and truth and prophesy. Certainly, Garrison was not modest about his opinions, nor was he reluctant to argue them vigorously. He attacked opponents like a bird of prey, with beak and talons flashing. Indeed, Garrison <u>was</u> a self-righteous, egocentric fanatic.[26] But it would be wrong to call him intolerant. Despite his own certainty that he knew the truth, Garrison was a believer throughout his career in free discussion and untrammeled inquiry. Despite his own deep religiosity, he always defended reason and free thought -- and on several rather different grounds.

First, Garrison argued that free inquiry would lead to truth. This was essentially the standard Anglo-American faith in free discussion that dated at least back to John Milton's "Areopagitica." In what is perhaps his fullest statement of his philosophy of free expression, Garrison clearly had Milton in mind:

> My conviction of the weakness and mutability of error is such, that the free utterance of any opinion, however contrary to my own, has long since ceased to give me any uneasiness as to the final triumph of Right. My confidence in the unconquerable energy of Truth is absolute; and therefore I ask for it, what only it requires, 'a fair field and no quarter.'[27]

Applying this doctrine to abolitionism, Garrison believed simply that slavery could not stand up to free discussion. The violent reaction of the South to the 1835 propaganda campaign was ample proof of this. Censorship was the South's only possible defense, for "the slave-system cannot bear investigation." After 1835, free expression became a cause closely associated with abolitionism. Garrison made the connection simply and confidently in his prospectus for 1836: "Slavery and freedom of the press cannot exist together."[28]

Garrison's devotion to free inquiry, however, extended beyond its tactical utility in the pursuit of truth. Increasingly, as he moved from a narrow anti-slavery stance to advocacy of "universal emancipation," free expression and free exercise of reason became for Garrison not merely the way to truth, but truth itself. Individual freedom of thought and conscience for everyone, along with physical independence for slaves, was what universal emancipation was all about. "The emancipation of our whole race from the domination of man" -- this was the goal. By the 1840s, Garrison had rejected all forms of coercion, religious hierarchy, and human government as incompatible with individual conscience and the government of God. Only when the individual is perfectly free could he be free to serve God perfectly.[29] As early as 1832, Garrison dedicated The Liberator to a long list of individual rights and freedoms, in addition to the abolition of slavery; and he summarized all of these goals as freedom of thought and speech, freedom of choice and action.[30]

But Garrison had yet another reason for favoring open discussion and free inquiry, a reason that was at heart journalistic and organizational. For Garrison, discussion was the essence of journalism. Though The Liberator is usually remembered for the vividness of its invective, perhaps a more striking

characteristic was its devotion to reader participation through correspondence and to the interchange of information and opinions on abolition and all the other reform questions that the paper pursued. From its founding in 1831 to its termination in 1865, The Liberator was never merely a propaganda sheet for Garrison's favorite causes. It was a forum open to the scattered individuals who viewed themselves as a community of reformers. It was a gathering together of the faithful. It was, as Garrison said in his valedictory editorial, the group's "weekly method of communicating with each other."[31]

The Liberator was not, however, an official organ of any association, though it was supported by the Garrison-dominated Massachusetts Anti-Slavery Society. Garrison was much too self-centered and self-righteous to accept editorial direction from anyone. But Garrison also argued that The Liberator's independence was necessary to secure its role as an open forum for discussion. This was its purpose and the secret of its success, Garrison said, though friends and foes alike did not always understand or agree. Both sides often attacked the eccentricities of The Liberator, because they believed the paper reflected or should reflect the principles of the abolitionist movement in general. Not so, Garrison declared. It reflected only his personal views and the views of his readers and correspondents, as he frequently reminded his critics:

> For the hundredth time I repeat it, -- the Liberator is an independent journal . . . . Hence it is not only unjust, but extremely base, to make any anti-slavery society responsible for what appears in its columns, and equally absurd and unreasonable to complain that it is open to the discussion of other questions besides that of chattel slavery; and most unjust is it to hold me responsible for the views of my correspondents, any further than they are approved by me. Those who do not want, or cannot tolerate such a paper, have a very simple remedy at hand, so far as they are concerned -- either not to subscribe for it, or, if they are subscribers, to discontinue it whenever they think proper. I mean that the Liberator shall be a FREE PRESS, in a comprehensive and manly sense; and I advise those who cannot endure free discussion to beware how they give it any countenance.[32]

In this way did The Liberator serve the movement most faithfully and fully,

Garrison believed, for if to tell the truth was the virtue of the reformer, to be free was the virtue of the press.

In the course of his life, Garrison was an editor first and a reformer later, and he never changed the philosophy of journalism and editorship that he developed in the 1820s on the Newburyport (Mass.) Free Press and the Bennington (Vt.) Journal of the Times.[33] As the new twenty-year-old editor of the Free Press, Garrison promised his readers that his columns would be open to everyone; but he would never seek their approval or solicit their patronage. They could subscribe or cancel, as they saw fit. He said the same to his readers two years later in Vermont. He would accept advice on every subject except one: how he should run the paper. In other words, as editor he expected to have complete freedom to speak the truth as he saw it. But he offered the same right to those who chose to participate in the community that the newspaper gathered around itself.[34]

Garrison conducted The Liberator on these same editorial principles. From the beginning, the forum function was central to its mission:

> Before the Liberator was established, I doubt whether, on either side of the Atlantic, there existed a newspaper or periodical that admitted its opponents to be freely and impartially heard through its columns -- as freely as its friends. Without boasting, I claim to have set an example of fairness and magnanimity, in this respect, such as had never been set before; cheerfully conceding to those who were hostile to my views, on any subject discussed in the Liberator, not only as much space as I, or as others agreeing with me, might occupy, but even more, if they desired it.[35]

At his retirement in 1865, Garrison reaffirmed his belief in his early editorial principles. "I have never consulted either the subscription list of the paper or public sentiment in printing, or omitting to print, any article touching any matter whatever," he said, adding that "no journal . . . has granted such freedom in its columns to its opponents; none has so scrupulously and uniformly presented all sides of every question discussed in its pages."[36]

Of course, no mortal could have been as just, fair, and magnanimous as

Garrison liked to remember that he was; and yet the pages of The Liberator, week after week and year after year, do bear witness to the general accuracy of Garrison's memory. Certainly, Garrison never held back his own views. In his famous opening statement in 1831, he promised: "I will not equivocate -- I will not excuse -- I will not retreat a single inch."[37] Historians generally agree that this is one editorial promise that the editor kept. But Garrison also fulfilled his promise to keep The Liberator's columns open for free discussion. The "Communications" department was always a centerpiece of the paper, often taking all of the first page and more of the four-page sheet. Indeed, in the paper's first year, Garrison sometimes complained that "to accommodate our numerous correspondents we are again necessitated to exclude our own communications to the public."[38] When philosophical or tactical debates arose among abolitionists, such as the conflict over political action at the end of the 1830s, Garrison fought aggressively for his point of view. But he gave space to all. At such times, The Liberator was practically given over to publication of letters, articles, speeches, statements, and rebuttals from all sides of the controversy.[39]

The Liberator also carried material from true enemies as well as from opponents from within the movement. Garrison seemed almost to delight in reprinting the abuse that the mainstream newspapers, from North and South, heaped upon him and the anti-slavery movement. Newspapers were not his only enemies. In a private letter in 1831, he wrote, "I am constantly receiving anonymous letters, filled with abominable and bloody sentiments. These trouble me less than the wind." In 1834, Garrison even started a new department of the paper called "Refuge of Oppression" to highlight these attacks and denunciations. Sometimes he offered editorial replies; sometimes he did not.[40]

Of course, not all the material in The Liberator was controversial. From the first, the paper performed the more mundane organizational function of

publicizing meetings and activities and publishing minutes and convention proceedings. The Liberator also carried informational, inspirational, and purely entertaining news and features. Its regular departments included children's stories, poetry, ladies' features, marriages and death notices, foreign and domestic news briefs, miscellaneous "brights," and a few advertisements for books, medicines, and boarding houses. Despite his reputation for dour earnestness, Garrison even included jokes in The Liberator -- and some were actually funny. Though the content of the paper fluctuated with the flux of events, this diversity was never missing. Even on the day that Garrison printed his famous account of how he was nearly killed by the Boston mob of 1835, the paper included the usual brights and anecdotes, including an account of a "shocking homicide" in Grafton and an item about a man who trained his hogs to work in harness.[41]

Garrison's editorial philosophy led him into a kind of love-hate relationship with public opinion. One of his favorite quotes was a line from Cicero, which he had used as the motto of the Journal of the Times: "Reason shall prevail with us more than Popular Opinion." And throughout his long career on The Liberator he seemed to glory in public odium. When he retired he counted the paper's short subscription list as a badge of honor. Yet he also believed that reason and popular opinion could be brought together through moral suasion and the power of the press. "We expect to conquer through the majesty of public opinion," he wrote in 1831. "Appalling as is the evil of slavery, the press is able to cope with it; and without the agency of the press, no impression can be made, no plan perfected, no victory achieved."[42] Like other abolitionists, Garrison believed that the American people, North and South, could be converted to the anit-slavery cause, through the dissemination of information and sound argument. "Let information be circulated among them as prodigally as the light of heaven, and they cannot long act and reason as

they now do," he said. To this end, one of the chief functions of an anti-slavery society must be "to scatter tracts, like raindrops, over the land" and to help start a hundred new periodicals devoted to the cause of emancipation.[43]

In short, Garrison idealized journalism. To him, journalism was the animator of social life, for it served the two great functions of social reform: agitation and discussion. Agitation is the function most often associated with the abolitionist press. But certainly agitation (or prophesy) was not all that Garrison had in mind for abolitionist journalism. Not agitation, but discussion -- free inquiry among the members of a community of readers -- seems to have been the chief work of The Liberator. Indeed, it might be argued that for Garrison, free discussion was a substitute for government -- a kind of democracy without coercion. From the late 1830s onward, Garrison rejected government in any form, including democracy, because all human governments rested upon coercion and power. But Garrison did believe in public sentiment, moral suasion, and voluntary reform organization as legitimate methods for change in society. And he believed that the press -- as agitator and, even more important, as forum for free discussion -- could and should lead the way. If, for Garrison, discussion was the essence of journalism, journalism was the essence of a perfect democracy.

IV

William Lloyd Garrison's Liberator, of course, was just one rather obscure point of light in the pluralist universe that Tocqueville observed in American journalism. A thousand other American newspapers were also at work, gathering communities of readers about them. Together they made up the enormously complex system of American social life and American democracy. Though Tocqueville was more interested than Garrison in the workings of journalism at this systemic level, he and Garrison were agreed that the purpose of newspapers lay with the

collective thought and action of the groups, the associations, the communities that grew up with them. If group action outside partisan politics was what made American democracy special, discussion and agitation were the necessary contributions of journalism. For Tocqueville, then, participation in journalism was one phase -- an increasingly important phase -- of participation in democracy.

A participatory, associational, group-based press may have been a good thing for American democracy, as Tocqueville thought; but this was not the direction of the revolution in American journalism in the 1830s. Newspapers were indeed democratized, but not in the way that Tocqueville foresaw. Instead, they were commercialized; that is, they were turned into consumer products to be sold for profit in the marketplace along with the other new products of the industrial revolution. The participatory and associational nature of the newspaper was increasingly subdued in this new world of the commercial popular press.

Neither agitation nor discussion played a central role for these new "penny papers." They continued both functions to some extent, especially in the discussion of politics and in the promotion of local business. Some editors, such as Horace Greeley of the New York Tribune, made valiant and partially successful efforts to carry some of the spirit of associational journalism into the commercial press. But, in general, the commercial papers were more interested in expanding circulations than in organizing communities of readers for political or social action. And agitation (perhaps unpopular "truth telling") and discussion (open access to a paper's columns) did not necessarily serve the circulation-building function. In place of agitation and discussion, the penny papers and their descendents preferred to report "the news" -- that is, to tell interesting stories of occurrences.[44] In place of an active group of readers who participated directly in the journalism process, the readers of the commercial popular press became an audience of passive spectators, watching

a great show that they were not a part of.[45]

The associational press would continue to develop in America in the late nineteenth century, but largely as a separate form of journalism, increasingly far removed from the mainstream. The mainstream, flowing from the penny paper revolution of the 1830s and '40s, would have its virtues, including some democratic, political virtues. But reader participation -- association building -- would not be one of them.

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NOTES

[1]Alexis de Tocqueville, Democracy in America, ed. by J.P. Mayer (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday & Company, 1969), p. 513.

[2]Ibid., p. 516.

[3]Ibid., p. 518.

[4]Ibid., p. 517.

[5]Ibid., pp. 519-20.

[6]Statistical View of the United States, Compendium of the Seventh Census, compiled by J.D.B. DeBow (Washington: Beverley Tucker, Senate Printer, 1854), pp. 154-58. See also Clarence S. Brigham, History and Bibliography of American Newspapers, 1690-1820, 2 vols. (Worcester, Mass.: American Antiquarian Society, 1947).

[7]Statistical View, pp. 154-58; Tocqueville, Democracy, p. 519.

[8]Ronald G. Walters, American Reformers, 1815-1860 (New York: Hill and Wang, 1978), pp. ix-xiv; Richard D. Brown, Modernization: The Transformation of American Life, 1600-1865 (New York: Hill and Wang, 1976), chapters 5-6. The classic study of antebellum reform is Alice F. Tyler, Freedom's Ferment (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1944). See also John Thomas, "Romantic Reform in America, 1815-1865," American Quarterly, XVII (Winter, 1965), 656-81.

[9]The term "perfectionism" derives from Jesus' Sermon on the Mount: "Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect" (Matthew 5:48).

[10]Walters, American Reformers, pp. 28-29. See also Laurence Veysey, ed.,

The Perfectionists: Radical Social Thought in the North, 1815-1860 (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1973), for a broad collection of perfectionist writings.

[11]Allan R. Pred, Urban Growth and the Circulation of Information: The United States System of Cities, 1790-1340 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1973), chapter 5. See also George Rogers Taylor, The Transportation Revolution, 1815-1860 (New York: Rinehart, 1951).

[12]Walters, American Reformers, pp. 5-6. See also Robert Hoe, Short History of the Printing Press (New York: R. Hoe & Co., 1902); [illegible]d Hunter, Papermaking: The History and Technique of an Ancient Craft (2nd ed.; New York: Knopf, 1947), pp. 340ff; Alfred McClung Lee, The Daily Newspaper in America (New York: Macmillan, 1947), chapter 5.

[13]The literature on abolitionism is vast. Two valuable recent overviews are Ronald G. Walters, The Antislavery Appeal: American Abolitionism after 1830 (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976); and Merton L. Dillon, The Abolitionists: The Growth of a Dissenting Minority (New York: W.W. Norton, 1979). The standard older histories are Gilbert H. Barnes, The Antislavery Impulse, 1830-1844 (New York: D. Appleton-Century, 1933); and Louis Filler, The Crusade Against Slavery, 1830-1860 (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1960). See also the essays collected in Martin Duberman, ed., The Antislavery Vanguard: New Essays on the Abolitionists (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1965); and Lewis Perry and Michael Fellman, eds., Antislavery Reconsidered: New Perspectives on the Abolitionists (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1979). A recent bibliographical review is Lawrence J. Friedman, "'Historical Topics Sometimes Run Dry': The State of Abolitionist Studies," The Historian, XLIII (Feb., 1981), 177-9[illegible]).

[14]Proceedings of the Anti-Slavery Convention, Assembled at Philadelphia, December 4, 5, and 6, 1833 (New York: Dorr and Butterfield, 1833). The Declaration of Sentiments, which was written by Garrison, is reprinted in Louis

Ruchames, ed., The Abolitionists: A Collection of Their Writings (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1963), pp. 78-83.

[15]The postal campaign and the reaction to it are described in Leonard L. Richards, "Gentlemen of Property and Standing": Anti-Abolition Mobs in Jacksonian America (New York: Oxford University Press, 1970), chapter 3; and Bertram Wyatt-Brown, Lewis Tappan and the Evangelical War against Slavery (Cleveland: Case Western Reserve University Press, 1969), pp. 149-63. See also Friedman, "'Historical Topics,'" p. 192.

[16]Filler, Crusade Against Slavery, pp. 97-98. See also W. Sherman Savage, The Controversy over the Distribution of Abolition Literature, 1830-1860 (Washington, 1938).

[17]Richards, "Gentlemen," pp. 55-62, 71-73.

[18]Walters, Antislavery Appeal, chapter 2.

[19]For example, see the range of historical opinion in George M. Fredrickson, ed., William Lloyd Garrison (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1968).

[20]Barnes, Antislavery Impulse, p. 58.

[21]Liberator, Jan. 1, 1831; Jan. 8, 1831. Quite a few of Garrison's major articles from The Liberator have been reprinted in collections. See Fredrickson, William Lloyd Garrison; Truman Nelson, ed., Documents of Upheaval: Selections from William Lloyd Garrison's The Liberator, 1831-1865 (New York: Hill and Wang, 1966); and William Lloyd Garrison, Selections from the Writings and Speeches of William Lloyd Garrison (Boston: R.F. Wallcut, 1852).

[22]Liberator, Sept. 12, 1835. See also ibid., Aug. 22, 1835.

[23]See, for example, "Harsh Language -- Retarding the Cause" and "Vindication of the Liberator" in Garrison, Selections, pp. 121-22, 178-81. See also Liberator, Aug. 22, 1835.

[24]Liberator, Sept. 3, 1831; Garrison, Selections, p. 122.

[25]Historians have long been interested in the agitation function of aboli-

tionists. See especially Aileen S. Kraditor, Means and Ends in American Abolitionism: Garrison and His Critics on Strategy and Tactics, 1834-1850 (New York: 1969), chapter 2. See also Louis Filler, ed., Wendell Phillips on Civil Rights and Freedom (New York: Hill and Wang, 1965).

[26]Garrison's personal style is explored critically, but fairly sympathetically, in both standard biographies: John L. Thomas, The Liberator: William Lloyd Garrison, a Biography (Boston: Little, Brown, 1963); and Walter M. Merrill, Against Wind and Tide: A Biography of Wm. Lloyd Garrison (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1963). See also Russel B. Nye, William Lloyd Garrison and the Humanitarian Reformers (Boston: Little, Brown, 1955).

[27]Liberator, Jan. 30, 1846. See also Kraditor, Means and Ends, pp. 93-94, 104-06.

[28]Liberator, Dec. 22, 1832; Aug. 29, 1835; Sept. 9, 1835; Nov. 7, 1835; Dec. 12, 1835. See also Russel B. Nye, Fettered Freedom (East Lansing: Michigan State College Press, 1949).

[29]Liberator, Dec. 15, 1837; Sept. 28, 1838. See also Lewis Perry, Radical Abolitionism: Anarchy and the Government of God in Antislavery Thought (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1973), chapters 2-3.

[30]Liberator, Jan. 7, 1832.

[31]Ibid., Dec. 29, 1865. See also James Brewer Stewart, "Garrison Again, and Again, and Again, and Again . . .," Reviews in American History, IV (December, 1976), 544-45.

[32]Garrison, "Vindication of the Liberator," in Selections, pp. 185-86. This is one of the clearest statements of Garrison's views of the role of the organizational press. See also The Liberator's 1840 prospectus and a mock dialogue on factionalism within the American Anti-Slavery Society, both in Liberator, Dec. 27, 1839.

[33]The fullest account of Garrison's pre-abolition journalism is still

Francis Jackson Garrison and Wendell Phillips Garrison, William Lloyd Garrison, 1805-1879: The Story of His Life. Vol I (New York: Century Co., 1885), chapters 3-5. This is the first volume of a four-volume biography by Garrison's sons.

[34]Newburyport Free Press, March 22, 1826; Sept. 21, 1826; Bennington Journal of the Times, Oct. 3, 1828, March 27, 1829. Parts of these statements are reprinted in Garrison and Garrison, William Lloyd Garrison, pp. 61-62, 70-71, 102-04, and 121-22.

[35]Garrison, Selections, pp. 184-85.

[36]Liberator, Dec. 29, 1865.

[37]Ibid., Jan. 1, 1831.

[38]Ibid., Feb. 19, 1831.

[39]See, for example, Liberator, December, 1839, every issue.

[40]William Lloyd Garrison to Henry E. Benson, Oct. 19, 1831, in The Letters of William Lloyd Garrison, Vol. I, ed. by Walter M. Merrill (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1971), p. 139. For examples of Liberator reprints of this sort, see Liberator, June 6, 1835; June 13, 1835; Aug. 15, 1835; Jan. 28, 1837. See also Thomas, The Liberator, pp. 131-33.

[41]Liberator, Nov. 7, 1835. Examples of this kind of material can be found in every issue in the 1830s, usually on the third and fourth pages.

[42]Ibid., June 18, 1831; Dec. 22, 1832.

[43]Ibid., March 26, 1831; July 30, 1831.

[44]Michael Schudson, Discovering the News (New York: Basic Books, 1978), pp. 21-23.

[45]Gunther Barth, City People: The Rise of Modern City Culture in 19th Century America (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980), pp. 64-65. See also Dan Schiller, Objectivity and the News: The Public and the Rise of Commercial Journalism (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1981),

chapter 2. My argument in this paragraph has to do with participation. The late-nineteenth-century metro press certainly had a role in building a kind of urban community in the sense of a common frame of reference for diverse peoples. But this was different from the active associational journalism that Tocqueville lauded.

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